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ABSTRACT

This brochure for parents reflects the position statement "Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children," jointly issued by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA). The brochure discusses ten simple suggestions for parents to nurture their child's development as a successful, enthusiastic reader and writer: (1) talk, sing, and play with your child; (2) make time to read together each day; (3) choose books with care; (4) surround your child with reading material; (5) slow down and have fun; (6) read it again and again; (7) foster your child's awareness of print and how to use it; (8) provide a variety of writing tools and materials; (9) don't push or pressure children about what or when to read; and (10) show children that you value their efforts. The brochure also offers: a list of what to look for in a child's classroom or care setting at the baby/toddler, preschool/kindergarten, and primary levels; suggested questions to foster conversation with a child's teacher; and further resources on children's books. (EV)

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All parents have these things in common:

We want our children to be safe and healthy.

We want them to be happy.

And we all want our kids to learn whatever they need to succeed. High on everyone's list of essential skills are reading and writing.

Readers and writers begin at home:

Your child snuggles in your lap for a bedtime story.

You spend a rainy morning at the library looking at books with your child and choosing what to check out.

"We need to buy more corn flakes!" your son announces, watching with fascination as you write the words on your shopping list.

Pointing to the scribble in the corner of her drawing, your daughter proclaims, "This says 'Maria,'" and she watches proudly as you hang it on the refrigerator.

Shared moments like these nurture your child's development as a successful, enthusiastic reader and writer. This booklet offers some things—simple and powerful—that a parent can do.

1. Talk, sing, & play with your child

Babies delight in hearing language. They coo or babble when you talk or sing to them and soon enter into back-and-forth interaction with you: the dawn of conversation.

As your child grows, keep the conversation going. Kids rapidly pick up concepts and words they hear used. They become familiar too with the sounds and rhythms of language. And you'll both have lots of fun as you chat, sing, and play together.

- Expand on what the child says. (When your toddler says, "Duck!" you might respond with, "You want your yellow duck?")
- Talk as you do simple everyday things together—bathing, eating, chores and errands, watching TV, riding in the car or on the bus.
- Recite nursery rhymes and do finger plays, games, and action songs such as patty-cake and "This Little Pig Went to Market," frequently repeating the child's favorites.
- Describe the child's activities. ("You're putting the marbles under the bowl" or "You're brushing your doll's hair.")

2. Make time to read together each day

Reading to children broadens their world, introduces them to the joys of reading, and expands their knowledge and vocabulary. Children learn what readers do, starting with simple things such as turning the pages and reading from left to right and top to bottom. Later they begin to pay attention to print and link it to the words they hear.

Children love having a regular reading time with a parent. Choose a time when you can be relaxed and not rushed—bedtime, naptime, or whatever works for you. Let your child pick a story. Then cuddle up together and enjoy!

• Don't forget reading time with dad or granddad (or other men in the child's family or circle of friends). Since teachers and librarians whom young children meet are usually women, some boys start thinking of reading as a "girl thing" and turn off to books and reading.

• Bring a few books when you take kids along on errands, especially those where you're likely to have time on your hands.

3. Choose books with care

Reading together often, you learn a lot about the kinds of books your child likes and understands. And you'll find children's librarians eager and able to help you find great books for kids of all ages and interests. (Also, see the Websites listed under Resources.)

• As you look through possible book choices, involve your child in deciding what to bring home.

• Look for books that relate to what's happening in the child's life at the time, whether it's a family trip or a new experience such as starting school.

4. Surround your child with reading material

Besides those wonderful library books that come and go every few weeks, children like having some books of their own that they can return to again and again. Affordable used books can be found at yard sales, thrift shops, and second-hand book stores, as well as at public library book sales.

• Consider subscribing to a good children's magazine. Kids love having something come in the mail for them! Also, libraries often loan children's magazines.

• Help your preschooler create a book of her own, with drawings, photos, or other items having meaning for her. She may want you to write what she says about each page, or she may choose to do her own writing—scribbles or spellings of her own invention. Encourage her to "read" her book to other family members or friends.

5. Slow down & have fun

It's not just *what* you read but *how* you read that matters. When you rush through or drone along, children quickly lose interest. Read with expression, putting yourself into the story. Try doing different voices for the characters. Your children will love it!

- Read at a leisurely pace with pauses here and there. This gives kids time to take in what they hear, mull it over, and imagine the people, places, and events.
- Occasionally pose a question or make a remark that will prompt the child to think, express himself, or relate the story to his own experience. ("Look, she's pulling her cat in a wagon! What do you think would happen if we tried that with Boots?")
- Follow the child's cues. Sometimes children are caught up in the story, particularly the first time through, and don't want stops and detours along the way. At other times they're ready to chat about the story or pictures and speculate about what-if or what-next questions.
- Now and then try skipping an expected phrase to see if the child supplies it, for instance, when you say, "But the baby bear's chair was _____," the child may sing out, "Just right!" Books with such repetition and predictable patterns are great for preschoolers and early readers.

6. Read it again . . . & again

As every parent knows, children often beg to hear the same story again and again. There's a lot for a child to take in, and children need and want to go through a book more times than grownups can imagine. Children also delight in knowing what comes next. Often kids learn a favorite book so well that they can "read" it on their own, feeling very much like readers.

With their enjoyment of the familiar, children like audiotaped stories. Does your child have out-of-town grandparents or other relatives? Suggest that they tape themselves reading children's stories.

What to look for in your child's classroom or care setting

Baby and toddler care settings

Are adults talking, singing, and interacting with children throughout the day?

Do you see caregivers reading or looking through books with one or two children? Especially good are selections with strong rhythm and rhyme, like Mother Goose.

Are there sturdy, washable books for children to look through?

Preschool and kindergarten

Is the classroom filled with interesting, useful print? For example,

- children's names used to label cubbies, identify belongings and work, and show jobs for the day;
- the alphabet displayed at the children's eye level and in places where they can use it, such as the book corner or the area where they write or draw;
- posters and pictures with captions, cartoons, calendars with special events noted; and signs, directions, labels on boxes of materials and supplies, and schedules.

Are books, writing tools, and paper in use? Are they handy for children to get on their own? Are children looking through books individually and together?

Does the teacher read books aloud every day? The teacher often reads to individual kids, small groups, and to the class as a whole. Big Books allow everyone to see the words and pictures and enable the teacher to point out patterns, repetition of sounds, and the like.

Do you see evidence that the teacher is promoting children's learning of sound-letter connections?

Primary classrooms

Where reading and writing thrive, you're likely to see

- most of the materials and activities found in kindergarten classrooms;
- small, flexible reading groups (not permanent groupings by ability) that meet with the teacher several times a week;
- frequent opportunities for children to choose books, magazines, and other materials to look at;
- scheduled writing times as well as children writing spontaneously and throughout all areas of the curriculum;
- individual writing conferences in which the teacher answers the child's questions, points out progress, and/or gives suggestions for further improvement; and
- opportunities for children to take their writing through successive stages, including (1) writing a draft and sharing it with others—peers as well as adults—to learn how to give and receive constructive feedback, (2) revising and editing to improve skills and show children that a first draft is only the start of creating a finished piece of writing, and (3) publishing the work when the child is ready to put it in a form for others to see.

7. Foster your child's awareness of print & how we use it

You're right on the scene to kindle your children's awareness of the letters and words that crop up in their daily lives. Children love to recognize—and later to write—their own names. And long before kids go to school they can learn to spot letters important to them, such as the Sesame Street *S* or the McDonald's *M*. They begin to notice the general shape and length of familiar words, and, finally, to identify some whole words. Here are ways you can help.

- Print your child's name on her lunch box and other belongings while she watches. Explain that the label will help everyone know that the item is hers.
- Talk about everyday print. ("Let's go here. The sign says Pizza Parlor")
- Point out letters and words and encourage your child to find them in books and all around (on games, packages, jars, ads, logos, and hundreds of other places).
- Challenge your child to be a print detective. ("Can you tell what cereal I've written on the list?" or "See if you can find a present for Jenny in the pile.")
- Provide magnetic or plastic letter tiles for children's play.
- When children are playing house, store, hospital, or other pretend activities, give them writing supplies and occasionally plant a writing/reading idea. For instance, to a child who is playing cashier, ask, "Can I pay you with a check?")

Once children have started reading and writing, there are still more things you can do to support their interest and progress, adapting to the child's skill level and giving help as needed and wanted.

- Encourage the child to read menus, TV schedules, weather reports, sports results, and other useful print, and to read and write letters, cards, lists, and messages.
- Write notes for kids to read. You might create a message board where you write—and encourage children to write—reminders, thank-yous, messages, and even riddles or trivia questions related to the child's interests.
- Show children how and what you write as part of your job.
- With your children start a family journal, recording special days, funny happenings, and big events, adding photos and mementos
- Maintain a Family News board where anyone can write headlines and updates about things family members do. ("Alex strikes out five batters!")
- Cook together, requesting the child's help in reading the recipe. ("What does it say to do next?")
- Involve your kids in planning a vacation or outing. Together you can look at maps, brochures, Websites. Children can also help in listing what to take and checking off things on the list.

8. Provide a variety of writing tools & materials

Some kids like having a special place where they can write; others like writing here and there as the spirit moves them. But they *all* like having a supply of writing materials handy.

- Stock a writing area with scrap paper, used greeting cards, bank forms, mail-order forms, envelopes, and little notebooks.
- Provide different kinds of markers, crayons, pencils, and other writing tools.
- Allow children to use a computer or typewriter to write. For some children the handwriting process itself is so laborious that they don't write unless they have to.

9. Don't push or pressure children about what or when to read

Don't nag your child to read. You'll defeat your purpose. If you're doing lots of the other things on this list, your child will get interested in reading.

And if your school-age children read only comic books or fan magazines, resist the temptation to be a critic. Pushing certain books or slighting what your children like is a mistake. Remember, they *are* reading.

Still there are positive, effective ways of broadening children's reading horizons. For instance, take turns picking the bedtime book and choose good books that are very popular with children of your child's age and interests (librarians can help here too). And take the long view: Kids stick with a craze for a while and then move on.

10. Show children that you value their efforts

Nothing is more important in raising readers and writers than showing genuine enthusiasm for children's reading and writing. Your reactions are more important to the child than anyone else's. Be the Great Appreciator, not the Great Corrector.

- Display your child's writing prominently and show how much you enjoy and value it.
- Ask your child to read to you, a younger sibling, or a special visitor.
- If a child makes a mistake when reading aloud, don't interrupt. If the mistake doesn't change the meaning, let it go.
- Make sure you read some of the books your children enjoy, even when they can read very well themselves, so you can share your reactions and pleasure together.
- Respond positively to the message in your children's writing rather than focus on handwriting or spelling.
- Talk with children about the reading and writing they are doing at school.

Talk with your child's teacher

Ask the teacher, "What are your goals for my child in reading and writing? How will you help him achieve these goals? What can I do to help?"

Also ask,

How often do you read to the children?

What kinds of books does my child enjoy?

What do you do to boost children's language skills, vocabulary, and interest in words?

How do the children learn about connections between print and the sounds of language?

How do you keep track of each child's early reading and writing skills? What can you tell me about them?

What kinds of things are you doing right now—this week or month—to help my child progress?

When children have begun reading and writing, you can ask,

Could you show me a book my child reads easily and a book she finds hard?

What reading strategies does my child use well? What progress has he made within the last several months?

Does my child choose to read during free time?

Can you show me samples of my child's writing from the beginning of the year and now?

What kinds of writing does she enjoy most? What ideas do you have for extending her writing interests? What can we do at home?

What about my child's progress in areas such as spelling and punctuation? What are your expectations for the year and what are you working on now?

Resources for parents

Young Children and African American Literature. An annotated bibliography developed by the National Black Child Development Institute in coordination with NAEYC. NAEYC order #568.

Internet resources to help parents find good books for children include the Children's Literature Web Guide (www.acs.ucalgary.ca/dkbrown/) and the American Library Association site (www.ala.org/parentspage).

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Boxes titled "What to look for in your child's classroom or care setting" and "Talk with your child's teacher" include material adapted from *Preschool for Parents: What Every Parent Needs to Know About Preschool* by Diane Trister Dodge and Toni S. Bickart (Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc.; Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks Inc., 1998) and *What Every Parent Needs to Know About 1st, 2nd & 3rd Grades* by Toni S. Bickart, Diane Trister Dodge, and Judy R. Jablon (TSI and Sourcebooks, 1997).

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